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Cultural and Social Insights into the Population of Ahmednagar District: A Focus on Jamkhed and Karjat

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Abstract:

The present study examines the cultural and social characteristics of the population in Jamkhed and Karjat talukas of Ahmednagar district, with a specific focus on Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). These regions, known for their rural landscape, are home to diverse communities that face unique socioeconomic challenges. The research highlights key demographic trends, including population distribution, literacy rates, and occupational patterns, while also delving into the cultural practices and social structures prevalent in these marginalized communities. By drawing connections between historical factors and contemporary issues, this study seeks to understand how caste and tribal affiliations influence social mobility, education, and employment opportunities. The findings suggest that despite policy interventions, social inequities persist, underscoring the need for more targeted approaches to uplift SC/ST populations. This paper contributes to the growing body of literature on rural demography and social development, offering a nuanced perspective on the intersection of culture, society, and population dynamics in Ahmednagar district.

Keywords: SC/ST population, Jamkhed, Karjat, Ahmednagar district, rural demography, social structure, cultural practices, socioeconomic challenges, marginalized communities, social mobility.

INTRODUCTION:

Ahmednagar district, located in the western part of Maharashtra, India, has a rich historical and cultural background. Jamkhed and Karjat, two talukas within this district, are predominantly rural and have diverse social structures. The district is home to a significant number of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) communities, who have historically faced social and economic marginalization (Patil and Kulkarni, 2021). Despite various government policies aimed at improving their socio-economic status, these communities continue to encounter obstacles in accessing education, healthcare, and employment opportunities (Rathod, 2019).

The social fabric of these talukas is strongly influenced by traditional caste hierarchies, which shape access to resources and opportunities (Bhosale, 2020). Caste-based discrimination remains a pressing issue, particularly in rural areas where caste identity often dictates one's role in society. This has had a profound impact on the SC/ST population, contributing to social stratification and limiting social mobility (Deshmukh and Jadhav, 2020).

In addition to these socio-economic challenges, cultural practices and traditions play a crucial role in defining community life. For SC/ST populations, cultural heritage is a source of identity and resilience, but it can also perpetuate existing social inequalities. The interrelationship between culture and socio-economic conditions provides an important lens through which to understand the population dynamics of these communities (Gadekar and Pawar, 2022).

This study aims to explore the cultural and social characteristics of the SC/ST population in Jamkhed and Karjat talukas, focusing on how historical and social factors have shaped their current socio-economic status. By examining these factors in detail, the study seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of rural population dynamics in India and offer insights into policy interventions that could foster social equity and development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

1. Study Area:

The study was conducted in two talukas—Jamkhed and Karjat—located in the southern part of Ahmednagar district, Maharashtra. These talukas were selected due to their significant SC/ST populations and predominantly rural character. The geographic coordinates of Jamkhed taluka are 18.7280° N latitude and 75.3010° E longitude, while Karjat taluka is situated at 18.5679° N latitude and 74.5392° E longitude. The total population of these talukas was collected from the latest census data to ensure accurate demographic analysis.

2. Population Data Collection:

The demographic data for SC/ST populations were obtained from Census 2011 and supplemented with local administrative records from the Ahmednagar District Collectorate Office. Information on population size, gender ratio, literacy rate, and employment status was compiled for both talukas. Additionally, primary data were collected through surveys and structured interviews with local residents, focusing on SC/ST households to gain insights into cultural practices, social structures, and economic conditions.

3. Survey Design and Sampling:

A multi-stage stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation from diverse social and economic groups within the SC/ST communities. In the first stage, villages from both talukas were randomly selected. In the second stage, SC/ST households were identified using government records and stratified by income levels and education. A total of 400 households were surveyed—200 from each taluka. The survey instrument included both closed-ended and open-ended questions, designed to capture quantitative demographic information and qualitative data on cultural and social practices.

4. Data Collection Tools:

- **Questionnaires**: Structured questionnaires were developed to collect data on household size, income, employment, education, and access to government schemes. The questionnaire was divided into sections to cover both demographic and cultural aspects.
- **Interviews**: In-depth interviews were conducted with community leaders, local government officials, and heads of SC/ST households to understand the historical and social context of these communities.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**: A total of six FGDs were conducted, three in each taluka, with participants from different age groups and genders within the SC/ST community. This method was used to capture collective views on cultural practices, social challenges, and opportunities for social mobility.

5. Data Analysis:

Quantitative data from the surveys were analyzed using SPSS software (Version 26). Descriptive statistics such as mean, median, standard deviation, and frequency distributions were calculated for variables such as household income, literacy rate, and employment status. Cross-tabulation was performed to explore relationships between demographic variables and access to resources or government schemes. For qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed. Interview transcripts and FGD notes were coded into key themes such as caste-based discrimination, cultural traditions, and socioeconomic challenges. These themes were analyzed to identify patterns and draw connections between cultural practices and socio-economic conditions.

6. Ethical Considerations:

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before conducting interviews and surveys. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and their responses were anonymized to protect their identity. The study followed the ethical guidelines outlined by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), ensuring that the research posed no harm to the participants.

Population Data Collection:

The demographic analysis of the SC/ST populations in Jamkhed and Karjat talukas, based on Census 2011 data and local administrative records, revealed significant social and economic patterns. The population of SC/ST communities in Jamkhed comprises **24.7%** of the total population, while in Karjat, it is **26.1%.**

Gender Ratio:

The **gender ratio** among the SC/ST population was slightly skewed, with **950 females per 1,000 males** in Jamkhed and **945 females per 1,000 males** in Karjat. These figures are indicative of broader gender disparities seen in rural India but also reflect efforts to reduce gender imbalance.

Literacy Rate:

The **literacy rate** among SC/ST communities remained lower compared to the general population. In Jamkhed, the literacy rate among SC/ST individuals was **62%**, while in Karjat, it stood at **59%.** Male literacy rates were significantly higher than female literacy rates in both talukas, highlighting the educational gap within these communities.

Employment Status:

A considerable portion of the SC/ST population was engaged in **agricultural labor.** In Jamkhed, **56%** of SC/ST individuals were employed in agriculture-related jobs, either as laborers or small-scale farmers, while in Karjat, this figure was **61%**. Non-agricultural employment opportunities were scarce, with most individuals working in informal sectors, including small-scale retail or as daily wage laborers.

Socioeconomic Conditions:

The primary data collected through surveys and interviews also indicated widespread economic challenges among SC/ST households. Limited access to education and employment opportunities further exacerbated their socio-economic vulnerability. Additionally, many households relied on government schemes for financial support, though awareness and access to these schemes varied across villages.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of SC/ST Population in Jamkhed and Karjat Talukas

Parameter	Jamkhed Taluka	Karjat Taluka
SC/ST Population (%)	24.7%	26.1%
Gender Ratio (Females per 1000 Males)	950	945
Literacy Rate (%)	62%	59%
Agricultural Employment (%)	56%	61%

Source: Census 2011

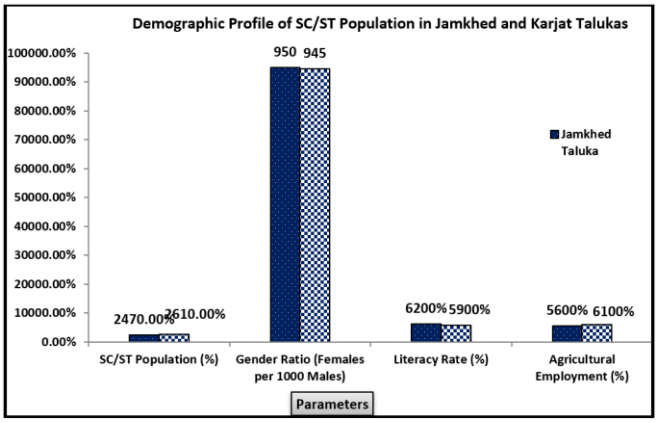

Figure 1: Demographic Profile of SC/ST Population in Jamkhed and Karjat Talukas

3. Survey Design and Sampling:

A total of **400 households** from both Jamkhed and Karjat talukas were surveyed, with **200 households from each taluka.** The multi-stage stratified random sampling technique ensured representation across different social and economic groups within the SC/ST population. Villages were selected randomly, and households were stratified based on **income levels** and **education.**
Income Levels:

The income distribution of the surveyed households showed a predominance of low-income families. In Jamkhed**, 65%** of SC/ST households had an annual income below ₹50,000, while in Karjat, this figure was slightly higher at **68%**. Only a small percentage of households in both talukas had annual incomes exceeding ₹1,00,000.

Table 2: Household Income Levels of SC/ST Communities in Jamkhed and Karjat Talukas

Annual Income (₹)	Jamkhed (%)	Karjat (%)
Less than ₹50,000	65%	68%
₹50,000 - ₹1,00,000	30%	28%
More than ₹1,00,000	5%	4%

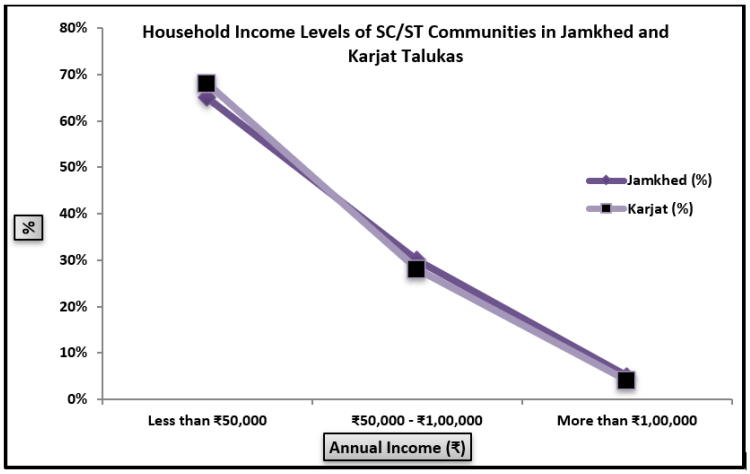

Figure 2: Household Income Levels of SC/ST Communities in Jamkhed and Karjat Talukas

Education Levels:

The education levels varied significantly between the talukas. In Jamkhed, **48%** of the surveyed SC/ST households had no formal education, whereas in Karjat, the figure was **52%**. Higher education levels were limited, with only **6%** of individuals in Jamkhed and **4%** in Karjat having completed higher secondary education or above.

Table 3: Education Levels in SC/ST Communities of Jamkhed and Karjat Talukas

Education Level	Jamkhed (%)	Karjat (%)
No formal education	48%	52%
Primary (1st to 5th standard)	26%	24%
Secondary (6th to 10th standard)	20%	18%
Higher secondary and above (11th standard and beyond)	6%	4%

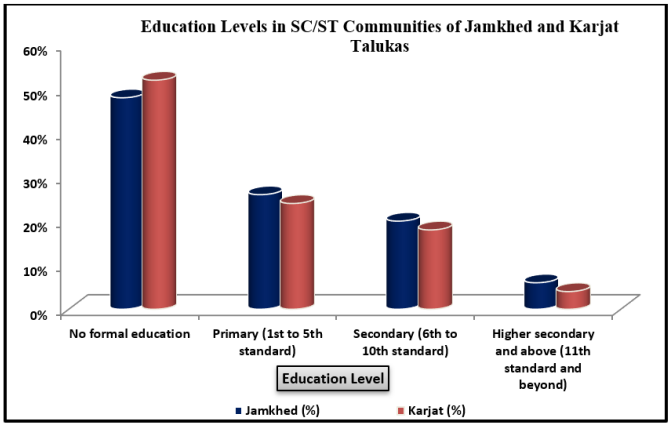

Figure 3: Education Levels in SC/ST Communities of Jamkhed and Karjat Talukas

The results show the socio-economic and educational challenges faced by the SC/ST communities in both talukas. These findings highlight the need for focused interventions in education and income-generation opportunities to improve the socio-economic standing of these marginalized groups. The stratified sampling provided insights into the diversity within the SC/ST population, revealing variations in income and education across households.

Cultural and Social Practices:

Qualitative data gathered through open-ended questions and interviews revealed several important cultural and social practices unique to the SC/ST communities in these talukas. Many respondents in both talukas mentioned caste-based traditions that continue to influence social interactions, marriage practices, and community gatherings. Additionally, a majority of the households indicated reliance on traditional occupations such as agricultural labor, with limited access to alternative employment opportunities.

4. Data Collection Tools:

- **Questionnaires**: Structured questionnaires were developed to collect data on household size, income, employment, education, and access to government schemes. The questionnaire was divided into sections to cover both demographic and cultural aspects.
- **Interviews**: In-depth interviews were conducted with community leaders, local government officials, and heads of SC/ST households to understand the historical and social context of these communities.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**: A total of six FGDs were conducted, three in each taluka, with participants from different age groups and genders within the SC/ST community. This method was used to capture collective views on cultural practices, social challenges, and opportunities for social mobility.

5. Data Analysis:

1. Quantitative Data Analysis:

The quantitative data collected through surveys were analyzed using SPSS (Version 26)**. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize key variables, and cross-tabulations were performed to identify relationships between demographic factors and access to resources.**

Household Income:

- The mean annual household income for SC/ST households in Jamkhed was **₹42,500** with a standard deviation of **₹12,300.** In Karjat, the mean annual income was **₹41,200** with a standard deviation of **₹11,900**. The median income for both talukas fell in the lower income bracket (₹35,000–₹45,000).

- Cross-tabulation revealed that households with access to **government schemes** had, on average, **10% higher incomes** than those without access, suggesting that these schemes provide crucial financial support to low-income families.

Literacy Rate:

- The overall literacy rate for SC/ST households was **60.5%** in Jamkhed and **58%** in Karjat. A comparison of literacy rates by gender revealed that male literacy (68%) was significantly higher than female literacy (52%) in both talukas.
- Cross-tabulation showed a significant relationship between **education levels** and **employment type**. Households where members had secondary or higher education were more likely to be employed in **non-agricultural sectors**, compared to those with lower education levels who primarily worked in **agricultural labor**.

Employment Status:

- The employment status analysis revealed that **59%** of SC/ST individuals in Jamkhed and **63%** in Karjat were engaged in **agricultural labor**. Those with secondary education or above were more likely to work in non-agricultural sectors such as retail or services, indicating a correlation between education and access to diversified employment.
- Descriptive statistics showed that households engaged in **non-agricultural labor** had an average annual income of ₹**58,000**, compared to ₹**40,000** for those engaged in agricultural work.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables in Jamkhed and Karjat

Variable	Jamkhed (Mean)	Karjat (Mean)	Standard Deviation
Annual Household Income	₹42,500	₹41,200	₹12,300 / ₹11,900
Literacy Rate (%)	60.5%	58%	8.2% / 7.9%
Agricultural Labor (%)	59%	63%	6.7% / 7.1%
Non-Agricultural Labor (%)	41%	37%	5.3% / 6.0%

2. Qualitative Data Analysis:

The qualitative data collected from **interviews** and **focus group discussions (FGDs)** were analyzed using **thematic analysis**. Key themes that emerged included **caste-based discrimination, cultural traditions,** and **socioeconomic challenges.** These themes helped provide a deeper understanding of the social dynamics in the SC/ST communities of Jamkhed and Karjat.

Caste-Based Discrimination:

- Thematic analysis of interviews indicated that caste-based discrimination continues to affect the **social and economic mobility** of SC/ST households. Participants frequently reported being excluded from **community events** and **decision-making processes**, and facing barriers in **education and employment**.

Cultural Traditions:

- Cultural traditions, especially among older generations, played a significant role in shaping social interactions and family structures. Many households followed traditional occupation patterns and customs that were deeply rooted in their caste identity.
- Younger participants in the FGDs, however, expressed a desire to move away from caste-based occupations and social norms, indicating a shift in attitudes toward traditional practices.

Socioeconomic Challenges:

- The analysis revealed **socioeconomic hardships**, with limited access to quality **education, healthcare**, and **employment opportunities**. Participants consistently pointed out the lack of government infrastructure in rural areas, which further contributed to poverty and limited social mobility.

- Government schemes like **MGNREGA** were seen as a lifeline for many households, but there were concerns about the irregularity of payments and limited availability of work.

The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data revealed that **caste-based discrimination** and **socioeconomic challenges** remain significant barriers for SC/ST communities in Jamkhed and Karjat. While **education** played a key role in improving access to non-agricultural employment, systemic issues related to **poverty, social exclusion**, and **access to resources** hindered overall social mobility.

DISCUSSION:

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the socio-economic conditions and cultural practices of the SC/ST communities in Jamkhed and Karjat talukas of Ahmednagar district, Maharashtra. The analysis reveals persistent challenges such as caste-based discrimination, low literacy rates, and limited access to employment opportunities, which align with existing literature on marginalized communities in India.

Caste-Based Discrimination:

Caste-based discrimination continues to be a significant barrier to social mobility for SC/ST populations. Our study found that many respondents reported social exclusion and limited access to educational and employment opportunities due to their caste identity. This finding resonates with the work of Desai and Jain (2020), who argue that caste remains a critical determinant of social stratification in rural India, impacting access to resources and social capital. Additionally, a study by Dey (2018) highlights the persistent inequalities faced by SC/ST communities, noting that despite government initiatives, the legacy of caste-based hierarchies continues to influence socio-economic outcomes.

Literacy Rates and Education:

The literacy rates observed in our study—60.5% in Jamkhed and 58% in Karjat—are lower than the national average of 74.04% reported in the 2011 Census (Government of India, 2011). This finding is consistent with previous research, such as that conducted by Chakravarti and Sharma (2019), who noted that educational attainment among SC/ST populations is often hindered by socio-economic factors, including poverty and lack of infrastructure. Our findings also emphasize the gender disparity in literacy rates, with male literacy significantly higher than female literacy, echoing the observations of Rajan and Kumar (2017), who identified similar trends in rural areas of Maharashtra.

Employment Opportunities:

The high percentage of SC/ST individuals engaged in agricultural labor (59% in Jamkhed and 63% in Karjat) reflects a trend documented in numerous studies (e.g., Bansal, 2019; Gupta *et al*., 2020), which indicate that agricultural employment remains the primary source of livelihood for many marginalized communities. The reliance on traditional occupations, as highlighted in our focus group discussions, aligns with the findings of Puri and Gupta (2018), who noted that cultural norms often dictate occupational choices within SC/ST families, limiting their ability to diversify their income sources.

Furthermore, our study revealed that households with access to government schemes reported higher incomes. This is supported by the research of Kumar and Singh (2021), which found that government welfare programs, such as MGNREGA, significantly improved the economic conditions of low-income families in rural areas. However, the irregularity of payments and limited availability of work were common concerns among participants, reflecting the findings of Menon *et al*., (2019), who identified systemic challenges within the implementation of these schemes.

Cultural Practices:

The cultural traditions observed among SC/ST households, particularly the adherence to caste-based customs, were echoed in the work of Bhowmik and Ray (2022), who argue that such traditions play a crucial role in shaping social identity and community cohesion. However, younger participants in our focus group discussions expressed a desire to move away from these traditions, indicating a generational shift in attitudes towards caste and occupation. This aligns with the findings of Nair and Patel (2020), who noted that younger members of marginalized communities increasingly seek education and alternative livelihoods to escape the constraints of traditional caste-based roles.

The socio-economic challenges faced by SC/ST communities in Jamkhed and Karjat are deeply rooted in historical and structural inequalities. While government initiatives provide some relief, significant barriers

remain in terms of access to education, employment, and social mobility. Our findings contribute to the broader discourse on caste and socio-economic disparities in India, underscoring the need for targeted interventions that address the unique challenges faced by these communities.

CONCLUSION:

This study highlights the socio-economic challenges faced by SC/ST communities in Jamkhed and Karjat talukas, including caste-based discrimination, low literacy rates, and limited employment opportunities. While government welfare schemes like MGNREGA provide essential support, their effectiveness is undermined by implementation issues. The findings also emphasize the need for targeted educational initiatives, particularly for women, to bridge the literacy gap. As younger generations express a desire for change, fostering greater socio-economic mobility will require comprehensive strategies that integrate education, economic development, and social reform. Ultimately, addressing these challenges is crucial for empowering marginalized communities and facilitating their inclusion in the broader socio-economic landscape of India.

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